DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 000 SP 026 561

AUTHOR Purnell, Richard F.; Gotts, Edward E.
TITLE Preparation and Role of School Personnel for Effective School-Family Relations.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (69th, Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Elementary School Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family School Relationship; Parent Participation; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Secondary School Teachers; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The results of analyzing the responses of 238 elementary and 208 secondary teachers about school-family interactions are presented. The questionnaire obtained information on: (1) the effect of and reasons for school-family interaction; (2) the preparation of personnel to work with families; (3) whether training to work with families is needed or desired; and (4) whether school-family interaction is perceived to have an influence on the child. Comparisons were made between elementary and secondary teachers. Some of the findings were: (1) the most prevalent techniques for interacting with parents are phoning about problems, parent-teacher conferences, open house, and having parents sign messages to be returned to school; (2) most parents come to school only when a problem exists; (3) more than two-thirds of the teachers feel training to work with parents is not adequate, but are not sure more training would help them do a better job; and (4) the majority of teachers at both levels feel that school-family interaction is essential for the academic achievement of the child, but parents lack time and/or interest to interact with teachers. Elementary teachers respond more favorably to school-home relations issues than secondary teachers. (Author/JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED262000

Preparation and Role of School Personnel for Effective School-Family Relations

Richard F. Purnell
University of Rhode Island

and

Edward E. Gotts
Huntington State Hospital
Huntington, West Virginia
and
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Charleston, West Virginia

Paper presented at the FAE SIG
"Parent Involvement: From
Research to Practice" Symposium
AERA

Chicago, Illinois
April, 1985

(Revised)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Purnell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- [x] This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- [ ] Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

SP 026 561

Abstract

The results of analyzing the responses of 238 elementary and 208 secondary teachers (from 15 counties or cities in a seven-state region of Appalachia) about school-family interactions are presented. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information on four themes: (1) the effect of and reasons for school-family interaction; (2) the preparation of personnel to work with families; (3) whether training to work with families is needed or desired; and (4) whether school-family interaction is perceived to have an influence on the child. Comparisons were made between elementary and secondary teachers.

Some of the findings were: (1) the most prevalent techniques for interacting with parents are phoning about problems, parent-teacher conferences, open house, and having parents sign messages to be returned to school, (2) most parents come to school only when a problem exists is the way most teachers describe school-family interactions; (3) more than two-thirds of the teachers feel training to work with parents is not adequate, but do not feel hampered by this and are not sure more training would help them do a better job; and (4) the vast majority of teachers at both levels feel that school-family interaction is essential for the maximum educational attainment of the child, but they feel that parents lack the time and/or interest to inteact with teachers. By and large elementary teachers respond more favorably to school-home relations issues than secondary teachers.

A major thesis of the report is that teachers interested in improving the school-home interaction at their schools must first get in touch with their attitudes, experiences, and practices in this area before proceeding.

Preparation and Role of School Personnel for Effective School-Family Relations[1]

Richard F. Purnell and Edward E. Gotts[2]

Last year at the AERA annual meeting in New Orleans, we presented a model for evaluating school-home communication strategies (Gotts and Purnell, 1984, April). That presentation emanated largely from working with school principals who were interested in using the Appalachia Educational Laboratory's (AEL) parent telephone-interview technique to obtain feedback on their school-home communications programs (Gotts and Purnell, in press). This year we turn our attention to data that were collected (concurrent with the telephone interviews of parents) from school personnel about school-family interactions.

More specifically, we are presenting on elementary and secondary teachers' reported preparation for, views of, experiences with, and needs for relating to families of the students in their schools. Data from practicing teachers about school-home relations are relatively scarce. The information reported here was collected to provide (1) insights for planning and designing relevant pre- and in-service experiences for school personnel[3] and (2) ideas for further descriptive or experimental studies in this area.

A major theme in our work has been to stress the importance of taking a systematic empirical approach to understanding school-family relations issues. This theme was evident in our selection of communications as a perspective for studying how schools and homes can operate more effectively together in educating the child. Principals,

easily among the ultimate pragmatists in education, were quick to see the value of this approach. Indeed, we found they eagerly and imaginatively used parent telephone interview data to adjust their school-home practices.

While the notion of systematically gathering information from teachers about a variety of topics is not novel (Ryans, 1960), neither are such studies plentiful in the school-family relations literature. We know of three other efforts of this type reported in the past five years. One represents ongoing research of a large, statewide sample of elementary-school teachers (Becker and Epstein, 1982). Another involved the survey of large numbers of elementary-school teachers and principals in a six-state region (Stallworth, 1981; Williams, 1981a; Williams, 1981b). The third presents the (views of teachers as part of) case studies of home-school collaboration in two junior high schools in a large, eastern metropolitan area (Tangri and Leitch, 1982). Our study adds to existing knowledge in that it samples: (a) pre-K through high school teachers; (b) from a different and widespread region; (c) about a different set of school-home questions and issues.

Other advocates of the practical importance of asking teachers to record and explore their experiences and views about school-home interactions, for example, are Swick (1979) and Berger (1981). Swick (1979, p. 98) thought-provokingly substitutes the word "meaningful" for the notion "practical." His position is essentially that one of the foundations needed to activate a meaningful family-school program is that "school personnel become involved in assessing their abilities and attitudes toward families."

Berger (1981), in her book on home and school working together, urges the use of a teacher's value clarification questionnaire as a means of preparing to understand and develop their roles in this enterprise. She also provides an example of such a questionnaire. We interpret both authors to be inviting teachers to participate in (self-)discovery learning about school-home relations. We hold that this has much to offer in the process of trying to understand where to begin in one's efforts to identify and/or develop needed programs. We realize there are certain social desirability and validity limitations to this kind of data. However, we feel such distortions are minor and decrease with the respondents' sincerity to actually want to learn and do something in this area. In the same vein, we feel obliged to remind readers to weigh carefully the appropriateness of applying our findings to populations other than those of the seven-state region we sampled.

In keeping with our past observations that (a) there is a dearth of knowledge about school-home relations at the secondary level and (b) that <u>different</u> <u>models</u> of school-home interactions are called for at the elementary and secondary levels, this presentation will highlight comparisons of elementary and secondary teachers' views on a number of school-home relations questions. Elsewhere (Purnell and Gotts, 1984 and Gotts and Purnell, 1985) we have compared the responses of these same teachers on the basis of the type of community (i.e., rural, small-town, and urban) in which they taught.

The following questions, with regard to similarities and distinctions between elementary and secondary teachers, and for the sample as a whole, are addressed in this report:

1. What opinions and views do teachers have about the effectiveness of school-family interactions?
2. What conditions (that is problems versus other conditions) do teachers ascribe to school-family interactions based on their experiences?
3. To what extent and in what forms are teachers prepared to work with families?
4. For what reasons do teachers contact parents and how frequently do these occur?
5. What techniques do teachers use to interact with parents?

Method

Sample

The 238 elementary and 208 secondary school teachers surveyed in this sample came from 15 counties or cities in a seven-state region (see Table 1). They are part of a larger (N=615) sample of professional school personnel whose locations had been randomly determined for data gathering during a Regional Parenting Survey. The purpose of that survey was to obtain current information about the education-related experiences and needs of parents in the Appalachian Region. The larger plan called for collecting complementary information from the school personnel of the same communities. Of the several bases for this tandem Regional School Personnel Survey, the ones being emphasized here are those that may contribute to preparing teachers to interact with families better and to increasing our understanding of their various roles in this area.

Table 1 contains distributions of the sample's 446 teachers on various demographic variables: state, school level, gender, years of experience, highest degree held, and type of community. In examining relevant variables to see whether they were distributed similarly across grade levels, it was found that gender (chi square = 66.751 w/1*df* has *p*=.0001) and highest degree held (chi square = 9.653 w/4*df* has *p*=.0467) were significantly associated with grade level.

More specifically for gender, the portions of males and females, respectively, for each grade level were 11% and 89% in elementary shools and 45% and 55% in secondary schools. For highest educational degree held by teachers from different grade levels the differences occurred mostly between the "Bachelors plus" and the "Masters" categories: 47% and 19%

elementary teachers, respectively, and 39% and 31% secondary, respectively, in those two categories.

Procedure

Key administrators in the 15 counties or cities were contacted for permission to gather the survey data. Each administrator was also asked to supply the names of local personnel who were available to collect the data. In all but two counties, where the key administrators handled the data gathering, these personnel were usually substitute teachers, retired teachers, or employees of the system. In any event, each site leader received training and materials from AEL on how to proceed.

Rosters listing the professional personnel of a system were provided to each site leader, who was instructed on how to draw a random sample of 50 names from the list. Professional personnel were defined to include teachers at any level or subject specialty, principals, assistant principals, special services staff, counselors, nurses, librarians, and psychologists. (Only the returns obtained from the teachers are reported here.) Thus, of the 750 respondents drawn in the random selection process, 615 or 82% completed the questionnaire. Administration of the questionnaire took place during the first half of 1983.

The site leaders distributed the questionnaires, collected completed forms, and mailed them to AEL for coding. For the purposes of addressing questions of interest in this study, the codes for the types of communities and grade levels of the teachers were collapsed as follows: (a) suburban, metropolitan, central city, and metropolitan desegregated categories became "urban area", while "rural" and "small town" retained

their original designations; (b) pre-K, kindergarten, and intermediate grades became "elementary" and middle, junior high, and senior high schools formed the "secondary" category.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was designed to require 20 minutes to complete. Besides relevant demographic items, it contained 27 substantive items that were designed to get at one of four themes: (1) the extent of and reasons for school-family interaction; (2) the preparation of personnel to work with families; (3) whether training to work with families is needed or desired; and (4) whether school-family interaction is perceived to have an influence on the child. Approximately 15% of the items were open-ended, with the remaining items being highly structured for objective coding.

Thirteen responses were used to form a scale to measure the teacher's participation in school-family relations (PARTIC). (Items consisted mostly of mentions the teachers made of various activities in which they interacted with the home, e.g., calling the home, visiting, sending materials home, etc.) An alpha reliability coefficient of .69 was obtained for this scale (N=518). In addition, since coding of the open-ended items was performed by trained persons with relatively unsophisticated educational research backgrounds, it was deemed desirable to evaluate their codings for intercoder agreement. One of the investigators coded a random sample of 50 questionnaires from three states. His coding of the open-ended item which asked teachers to list the topics about which they interacted with parents agreed with the codings of the trained coders at an acceptable rate of 90.1%.

Results

Table 2 contains the responses of elementary and secondary teachers to ten questions about their views and opinions on the effectiveness of school-family interactions (SFIs). First, elementary teachers (83.4%) significantly more often than secondary teachers (60.0%) feel that SFI is essential for the child's maximum educational attainment. Second, they significantly more often feel that although working with parents requires a great deal of time, it is worth the effort (E=61.5%; S=50.5%). Third, elementary (24.3%) and secondary (15.1%) teachers differ significantly on the percentages of parents who they feel have the time and interest to interact with teachers, although a majority of both groups of teachers (E=75.7%; S=84.9%) feel that parents lack the time and/or interest to interact with them. (Note: E=42.7% and S=51.9% say parents lack interest or both time and interest.)

Next, teachers from the two grade levels do not differ significantly on their agreement with the idea that students with parents who are involved in school activities do better schoolwork than their peers (E=85.7%; S=83.8%). Neither do they differ significantly in the proportions who feel that parent/school interaction is needed throughout the child's total school experience (E=72.8%; S=75.0%).

The remaining five issues in Table 2 deal with what the teachers feel schools must do if effective SFI is to occur. Though the great majority of both groups feel that it is essential to be knowledgeable of the kinds of contributions parents can make, the elementary teachers (85.8%) feel this significantly more often than the secondary teachers (79.75%). However, secondary teachers (54.5%) significantly more

frequently (E=39.7%) feel that staff need to be provided time with pay in order to carry out SFI duties.

Having a more open attitude toward visitors (E=36.6%; S=35.2%), making better use of time already allocated for SFI (E=45.3%; S=42.1%), and being flexible in scheduling events (E=57.3%; S=51.5%) received moderate levels of concurrence from both groups of teachers, and they were not significantly different from each other on any of these.

In summarizing the salient combined elementary and secondary findings of Table 2, the teachers sampled agree to a great extent that: (1) children of involved parents do better schoolwork, (2) schools must be knowledgeable about how to involve parents, and (3) parents lack the time and/or interest to be involved, even though (4) it is needed throughout their children's total school experience. However, elementary teachers dramatically more often than secondary teachers see parent involvement as essential to maximizing the child's educational attainment. They also see the time teachers spend working with parents as being worthwhile more frequently than secondary teachers.

Table 3 presents the degree to which teachers agree with certain descriptions of the conditions of SFIs in their schools. More elementary (41.1%) than secondary teachers (26.9%) see most parents as welcome at school and enjoying coming; however, more secondary teachers (S=66.4%; E=54.2%) feel parents are welcome but are reluctant to come. While large numbers of both groups of teachers (E=73.7%; S=83.2%) feel that most parents come only when problems exist, secondary teachers feel this significantly more often. Also secondary teachers significantly more often feel most parents do not contact the school at all (E=33.1%; S=45.7%).

However, teachers are similar in their frequency of describing parents as being uneasy when meeting with school personnel (E=33.9%; S=32.2%), although the majority of them (about 66%) do not characterize parents as being uneasy when meeting with teachers. Secondary teachers (37.0%) more frequently (E=27.5%) feel middle- and upper-class parents initiate interactions with the school, although, again, the obverse of these percentages suggests a lot of teachers feel all classes of parents initiate school interactions.

The remaining items in Table 3 shift from teachers' perceptions of parents to their perceptions of teachers. Only a small minority of teachers say most teachers feel: (1) unprepared to work with parents (E=14.0%; S=11.1%), (2) uncomfortable when conducting parent-teacher conferences (E=16.5%; S=18.8%), or (3) reluctant to deal with parents (E=11.0%; S=13.0%). Elementary and secondary teachers do not differ significantly on these items.

On the other hand, significantly more elementary teachers say most teachers feel: (1) adequately trained to work with parents (E=36.4%; S=27.9%), (2) they would do a better job of working with parents if more training were provided (E=44.1%; S=39.9%), and (3) they use parents in the classroom only when they have complete control (E=22.0%; S=11.1%).

Elementary teachers significantly more often (E=71.2%; S=63.9%) feel the type of community the school is serving influences parent involvement level. They do not differ significantly from secondary teachers on how frequently (E=48.3%; S=42.3%) they say principals determine the general climate of the school that influences whether parents feel welcome in the school.

From the responses presented in Table 3, it appears the bulk of teachers feel parents are welcome at school but elementary teachers more often see them enjoying coming to school and secondary teachers more often see them reluctant to come. The great majority of both groups see most parents coming only when a problem exists, and many (but not a majority of) teachers report most parents not contacting the school at all. Two out of three teachers do not see parents being uncomfortable when meeting with school personnel and about the same portion see all social classes initiating interactions with the school.

While very few respondents say that teachers are unprepared, uncomfortable, or reluctant to work with parents, more than two thirds indicate teachers' training to do so is inadequate. However, only about forty percent of the sample feel that teachers would be able to do a better job of working with parents if more training were provided. This, by the way, appears to be independent of the amount of training teachers have received for working with families.

Lastly for Table 3, about two thirds of the sample say the type of community the school is serving influences the degree of parent involvement in the school, but slightly fewer than half the sample feel the principal determines the parent involvement climate of the school. Thus, there is much greater consensus among teachers about how they view the influence of community than there is about how they view the principal's influence on parent involvement.

Table 4 shows the percentages of elementary and secondary teachers who reported having various forms of preparation to work with families. Significantly more elementary teachers reported having one or more

graduate courses (E=23.1%; S=15.0%) and one or more inservice training sessions (E=43.0%; S=31.2%). However, teachers at the different grade levels do not differ in their incidences of undergraduate training to work with families (E=34.4%; S=34.6%) or "other" forms of training (E=15.0%; S=14.2%).

By summing the number of training experiences cited by each teacher across these four forms of preparation to work with families, we created a total school-family relations training (SFRTRNG) score per teacher. While elementary teachers have a higher mean SFRTRNG score (E=2.1; S=1.7), the difference is not statistically significant (t=.594 w/444df has p greater than .05). However, Table 4 presents the frequencies at which elementary and secondary teachers received different SFRTRNG scores, and it can be seen that 10% fewer elementary teachers than secondary teachers report having no training to work with families.

Table 5 shows that elementary teachers differ appreciably from secondary teachers on the frequencies at which they cite various reasons for interacting with parents. Discipline (E=71.9%; S=51.9%), school policies (E=18.5%; S=6.7%), attendance (E=35.3%; S=23.1%), volunteer work (E=38.7%; S=13.0%), and health (E=34.9%; S=18.3%) are reasons cited significantly more often by elementary teachers than by secondary teachers. Secondary teachers cite only school-sponsored activities (E=32.4%; S=42.3%) significantly more frequently than elementary teachers.

After being asked to describe the topics around which they interacted with parent, teachers were then asked in which activities they would most like to receive help. Of the 446 teachers, 148 (or 33.2%) indicated a desire to receive help or additional training. The two

top-mentioned areas were "discipline" by 82 (18.4%) of the teachers and "grades" by 41 (9.2%). In both cases the elementary teachers requested help or additional training significantly more frequently than the secondary teachers (discipline: E=21.4%; S=14.9% and grades: E=13.9%; S=3.9%).

Certain categories are flagrantly conspicuous in Table 5 (from a school-family relations viewpoint) because of their extremely low incidences of mention as a reason for contacting parents. These are: curriculum, working with parents on home activities, special needs of the child, and attitudes and values. These appear to be very fertile areas for improving school-home relations and parent involvement.

Table 6 shows the percentage of teachers who report using various techniques for interacting with parents. Here we see that elementary and secondary teachers do not differ significantly on three out of the thirteen techniques (home visits, phoning home about outstanding activities of child, and use of a parent day). Elementary teachers significantly more often mention using the remaining ten techniques for interacting with parents than do secondary teachers.

Calling parents to report problems, etc. (93.3%), parent-teacher conferences (90.8%), sending home messages to be signed (81.1%), open house (78.6%), and having parents sign children's graded papers (75.2%) are the five highest frequency techniques elementary teachers cite using. Calling parents to report problems (80.3%), parent-teacher conferences (79.3%), open house (69.2%), sending home messages to be signed (59.1%), and having parents sign children's graded papers (51.0%) are also the five highest frequency techniques secondary teachers checked off as using. We

note that both groups use the same five techniques most frequently in almost the same ranked order.

Besides home visits, which is the technique used most rarely by teachers (E=7.6%; S=8.7%), there is remarkably little use of a "formal reading program..." (E=27.3%; S=5.8%), newsletters (E=21.9%); S=15.9%), and inviting parents to school (E=34.0%; S=26.4%). It is also noteworthy that more than twice as many teachers call homes about problems (E=93.3%; S=80.3%) as call about positive accomplishments of their students (E=43.7%; S=37.5%).

Since respondents were asked to indicate in a separate question how frequently they phone parents during the school year, it is possible to "validate" or qualify their reported telephoning and expand on what they mean by this reported practice. Of the elementary teachers, 10.2%, 33.1%, and 54.5% said they called parents 2-3 times weekly, 2-3 times monthly, and 5-10 times during the school year, respectively. For the same categories, secondary teachers reported calling parents 7.7%, 22.1%, and 60.6%, respectively. These distributions are significantly different (chi square = 15.709 w/3df has p=.0013). By elimination, 2.5% elementary and 9.6% secondary teachers do not call parents. Furthermore, we point out that this implies the calling behavior alluded to in Table 6 represents calling homes at least five times a school year and as much as 3 times weekly.

While more elementary teachers report using the different techniques for interacting with parents, it does not necessarily follow that they participate more overall in school-home interactions. The answer to this question was sought by comparing elementary teachers' participation in

school-family relations activities (PARTIC scores) with those of secondary school teachers. The elementary PARTIC scale scores ($\underline{M}$=10.9) were found to be significantly higher than the secondary PARTIC scale scores ($\underline{M}$=8.1) by means of an analysis of variance ($\underline{F}$=109.54 w/1 and 438$\underline{df}$ had a $\underline{p}$ less than .0001). These results show that elementary teachers participate more frequently with parents than secondary teachers. However, it must be recognized that generally elementary teachers have contact with fewer students in a school year than secondary teachers.

Discussion

The five questions posed at the outset of this paper are now reviewed in light of the results just reported. First, we found that a substantial majority of teachers at both levels feel that school-family interaction is essential for the maximum educational attainment of the child. However, they also feel that parents lack the time, interest, or both to interact with teachers. Further, better than half the teachers feel that working with parents is worth the extra time it takes. They substantially agree that this effort is needed at all grade levels and that in order for it to be effective schools must familiarize themselves with the kinds of contributions parents can make.

Teachers indicate that parents are most likely to interact with them only when there is a problem with their child. On the other hand, as we have already seen, teachers admit that they themselves may be responsible for this when they state that they are most likely to contact parents in connection with a problem. Teachers generally feel that most parents are welcome at school, but they are divided on whether the parents enjoy or

instead are reluctant about coming to school. Again, two thirds of these teachers say the type of community is an important influence on parent involvement. But, teachers are split fairly evenly on the importance of the principal in contributing to the parent-involvement climate of their schools.

More than two-thirds of the respondents feel teachers' training to work with parents is not adequate. However, most do not see teachers as being hampered by this and are not sure that more training would help them do a better job. Moreover, substantial numbers of teachers have not received any formal training to work with families. Only a third of the teachers surveyed indicate that they would like to receive any help or training in any of the dozen areas they mention as reasons for working with parents. The two areas mentioned for receiving help to any appreciable degree were discipline and grades.

Topics or areas for contacting parents that are essentially neglected by teachers are: special needs of child, curriculum, working with parents on home activities, and attitudes and values. The only area of this type teachers report making contact in is one in which parents or students are asked to read on a regular basis. Use of this was reported by only 27% of the elementary and 6% of the secondary teachers. It is not yet clear to us why these areas are not more widely attended to by teachers.

The most prevalent techniques for interacting with parents are phoning them about problems, parent-teacher conferences, open house, and having parents sign various kinds of messages to be returned to school. Classroom newsletters were least used only second to home visits as a technique to keep parents informed and communicate with them.

Conclusions

Teachers overwhelmingly agree with expert opinion that it is important to involve parents in the education of their children. Compared to direct evidence from parents, however, teachers are drastically at odds on the degree to which parents are interested in and willing to take the time for such activities. We see that the majority of teachers are willing to work with parents and think it is a worthwhile use of their time. However, there is reason to believe that they need to explore ways to increase their effectiveness in this area.

Teachers need to realize that they are one important reason that most parents come to school only when there is a problem. Those who say parents are welcome but reluctant to come need to think in terms of identifying the source of and reducing that reluctance. They also need to make greater use of their belief that the community is a powerful influence on the level of parent involvement in their schools. By the same token, those 50% who do not credit the principal with playing an important role in school-home relations need to revise their thinking on that point, as it is not consistent with other findings. This could lead them to ask their principals to provide leadership in this area.

Teachers are going to have to resolve their ambivalence about the role of training in assisting them to do a better job of working with families. There is something puzzling about educators not seeing themselves as being able to benefit from training in this area. Further study is certainly warranted to try to solve this puzzle. Educators especially must attempt to keep up with the latest developments in their field and school-home relations is unquestionably one of the frontrunners vying for their attention.

Being empirical fostered the discovery of such discrepancies as the several topics that received virtually no attention by teachers, teachers calling parents about negative matters more than twice as often as for positive reasons, and the identification of school-home areas in which help or further training would be appreciated by teachers. What will be discovered elsewhere will depend on the local context. The place to start in the process of improving the preparation and role-clarification of a group of teachers in school-home interaction matters is for them to collectively examine their existing practices, views, and attitudes.

Table 1

Distribution of Elementary and Secondary Teachers from Fifteen Appalachian Communities on Various Demographic Variables.

State	N	%
W. Virginia	49	11.0
Kentucky	75	16.8
Tennessee	63	14.1
Virginia	61	13.7
Alabama	63	14.1
Pennsylvania	66	14.8
Ohio	69	15.5
Total	446	100.00

Grade Level	N	%
PreK-K	24	5.4
Primary	123	27.6
Intermediate	91	20.4
Middle	76	17.0
Jr. H.S.	21	4.7
Sr. H.S.	111	24.9
Total	446	100.00

Years of Experience	N	%
0-3	32	7.2
4-6	57	12.8
7-9	80	17.9
10-12	78	17.5
over 12	192	43.1
No response	7	1.6
Total	446	100.00

(Table continues)

Table 1 - continued

Degree held	N	%
Bachelors	66	14.8
Bach. + credits	194	43.5
Masters	111	24.9
Mast. + credits	71	15.9
No response	4	.9
Total	446	100.00

Type of Community	N	%
Rural	146	32.7
Small town	192	43.1
Urban	96	11.5
No response	12	2.7
Total	446	100.00

Gender	N	%
Male	118	26.5
Female	328	73.5
Total	446	100.00

Table 2

Percentages of Elementary and Secondary Teachers' Views and Opinions About the Effectiveness of School-Family Interactions (SFIs)

Issue or Question	% Elementary	% Secondary	Chi Square*
1. SFI is essential for the child's maximum educational attainment.	(N=235) 83.4%	(N=205) 60.0%	d
2. Working with parents requires a great deal of teacher's time but is worth the effort.	(N=231) 61.5%	(N=200) 50.5%	d
3. Parents' availability to interact with teachers:	(N=218)	(N=185)	
They have the time and interest	24.3%	15.1%	
They lack either time or interest	63.3	67.0	
They lack both time and interest	12.4	17.9	a
4. Students with parents who are involved in school activities do better schoolwork than their peers.	(N=231) 85.7%	(N=197) 83.8%	ns
5. Parent/school interaction is most needed throughout the total school experience.	(N=235) 72.8%	(N=204) 75.0%	ns
If effective SFI is to occur, the school must:			
6. Be knowledgeable of the kinds of contributions parents can make.	(N=232) 85.8%	(N=202) 79.7%	a
7. Provide time, with pay, for staff to carry out these duties.	(N=232) 39.7%	(N=202) 54.5%	c
8. Have a more open attitude toward visitors.	(N=232) 36.6%	(N=202) 35.2%	ns
9. Make better use of time already allocated for this purpose.	(N=232) 45.3%	(N=202) 42.1%	ns
10. Be flexible in scheduling events.	(N=232) 57.3%	(N=202) 51.5%	ns

*a = chi square significant beyond 10% level.
b = chi square significant beyond 5% level.
c = chi square significant beyond 1% level.
d = chi square significant beyond .1% level.
ns = not significant

Table 3

Percentages of Elementary and Secondary Teachers' Ascribed Conditions for Various School-Family Interactions (SFIs)

Experience	% Elementary (N=236)	% Secondary (N=208)	Chi Square*
1. Most parents are welcome at school and enjoy coming.	41.1%	26.9%	c
2. Most parents are welcome but seem reluctant to come.	54.2	66.4	c
3. Most parents come only when a problem exists.	73.7	83.2	b
4. Most parents do not contact schools at all.	33.1	45.7	c
5. Most parents seem uneasy when meeting with school personnel.	33.9	32.2	ns
6. Only middle- and upper-class parents initiate interactions with the school	27.5	37.0	b
7. Most teachers feel unprepared to work with parents.	14.0	11.1	ns
8. Most teachers feel uncomfortable when conducting parent-teacher conferences.	16.5	18.8	ns
9. Most teachers feel adequately trained to work with parents.	36.4	27.9	b
10. Most teachers would be able to do a better job of working with parents if more training were provided.	44.1	39.9	ns
11. The type of community the school is serving influences the parent involvement level.	71.2	63.9	a

(Table continues)

Table 3 - continued

Experience	% Elementary (N=236)	% Secondary (N=208)	Chi Square*
12. Most teachers feel reluctant to deal with parents.	11.0	13.0	ns
13. Teachers use parents in the classrooms only when teachers have complete control, e.g., in doing volunteer work.	22.0	11.1	c
14. Principals determine the general climate ... (that) influences whether parents feel welcome in the school.	48.3	42.3	ns

*a = chi square significant beyond 10% level.
b = chi square significant beyond 5% level.
c = chi square significant beyond 1% level.
d = chi square significant beyond .1% level.
ns = not significant

Table 4

Percentages of Elementary and Secondary Teachers Who Reported Having Various Forms of Preparation to work with Families.

Preparation	% Elementary	% Secondary	Chi Square*
1. Undergraduate	(N=233)	(N=205)	
Two or more courses	18.9%	18.5%	
One course	15.5	16.1	
No courses	65.7	65.4	ns
2. Graduate	(N=234)	(N=208)	
Two or more courses	10.3%	6.3%	
One course	12.8	8.7	
No courses	76.9	85.0	a
3. Inservice Training	(N=235)	(N=208)	
Three or more sessions	6.8%	4.8%	
One or two sessions	36.2	26.4	
No sessions	57.0	68.8	b
4. Other forms of training	(N=233)	(N=205)	
Yes	15.0%	14.2%	ns
5. SFRTRNG Scores	(N=238)	(N=208)	
0 Training Experiences	33.6%	43.8%	
1-3 Training Experiences	46.2	39.8	
4-6 Training Experiences	14.8	14.4	
7-10 Training Experiences	5.4	1.9	b

*a = chi square significant beyond 10% level.
b = chi square significant beyond 5% level.
c = chi square significant beyond 1% level.
d = chi square significant beyond .1% level.
ns = not significant

Table 5

Percentages of Elementary and Secondary Teachers Who Mention Various Reasons for Contacting Parents.

Reason	% Elementary	% Secondary	Chi Square*
Discipline	71.9	51.9	d
School Policies	18.5	6.7	d
Grades	69.8	74.0	ns
Attendance	35.3	23.1	b
Volunteer Work	38.7	13.0	d
School Activities	32.4	42.3	c
Health	34.9	18.3	d
Attitudes and Values	2.5	4.3	ns
Special Needs of Child	1.7	1.9	ns
Curriculum	.8	2.4	ns
Miscellaneous Reasons	10.9	14.4	ns
Working with Parents (Home activities)	2.1	9.0	ns

*a = chi square significant beyond 10% level.
b = chi square significant beyond 5% level.
c = chi square significant beyond 1% level.
d = chi square significant beyond .1% level.
ns = not significant

Table 6

Percentages of Elementary and Secondary Teachers Who Report Using Various Techniques for Interacting with Parents.

Technique	% Elementary (N=238)	% Secondary (N=208)	Chi Square*
1. Formal reading program in which parents or students read on regular basis.	27.3%(11)**	5.8%(13)	d
2. Have parents sign children's graded papers.	75.2 (5)	51.0 (5)	d
3. Send a letter home to parents when a new phase of work begins.	54.6 (6)	22.1 (9)	d
4. Send home messages to be signed by parent and returned to school.	81.1 (3)	59.1 (4)	d
5. Make home visits at beginning of year.	7.6 (13)	8.7 (12)	ns
6. Call parents to report problem, inquire about illness, etc.	93.3 (1)	80.3 (1)	d
7. Call parents to report outstanding activity of child.	43.7 (8)	37.5 (6)	ns
8. Parent "day."	29.8 (10)	35.6 (7)	ns
9. Open house.	78.6 (4)	69.2 (3)	b
10. Invite parents to school on a regular basis	34.0 (9)	26.4 (8)	a
11. Ask parents to assist in the classroom.	52.5 (7)	17.8 (10)	d
12. Parent-teacher conferences.	90.8 (2)	79.3 (2)	d

(Table continues)

Table 6 - continued

Technique	% Elementary (N=238)	% Secondary (N=208)	Chi Square*
13. Newsletters mailed home on a regular basis.	21.9 (12)	15.9 (11)	a

*a = chi square significant beyond 10% level.
b = chi square significant beyond 5% level.
c = chi square significant beyond 1% level.
d = chi square significant beyond .1% level.
ns = not significant

**Numbers in parentheses signify the ranking of techniques according to their "popularity" or frequency of use by teachers.

Notes

1. The work reported here was supported through the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), Inc., by various grants and contracts from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education and by a sabbatical study award from the University Rhode Island. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, the National Institute of Education, or the University of Rhode Island, and no official endorsement by any of these agencies should be inferred.

2. To correspond with the authors, the following addresses may be used:

Richard F. Purnell, Ph.D.
Department of Education
703 Chafee Building
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, Rhode Island 02881

Edward Earl Gotts, Ph.D.
Psychology Department
Huntington State Hospital
P. O. Box 448
Huntington, West Virginia 25709

3. Other works (available from AEL) intended to be of value to practitioners in improving their efforts in school-home communications and relations to come out of this study are:

a. a resource notebook (McAfee, Gotts, Orletsky, and Sattes, 1984)

b. workshop resource materials on parent support/involvement (Purnell, 1984b)

c. workshop resource materials on assessing community satisfaction with schools (Purnell, 1984a)

References

Becker, H.J. & Epstein, J. L. (1982, April). Influences on teachers' use of parent involvement at home (Report No. 324). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools.

Berger, E. H. (1981). Parents as partners in education. St. Louis: The C. V. Mosby Co.

Gotts, E. E. & Purnell, R. F. (1984, April). Evaluation of School-home communication strategies. Paper presented at the annual meeting of AERA in New Orleans.

Gotts, E. E. & Purnell, R. F. (1985). Families and schools in rural Appalachia. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Gotts, E. E. & Purnell, R. F. (in press). Communications: key to school-home relations. In Griffore, R. J. & Boger, R. P. (Eds.), Child rearing in the home and school. New York: Plenum.

McAfee, O. D., Gotts, E. E., Orletsky, S., & Sattes, B. (1984). A resource notebook for school-home communications. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory.

Purnell, R. F. (1984a). Assessing community satisfaction with schools: Workshop resource materials. Charleston, WV: Applachia Educational Laboratory.

Purnell, R. F. (1984b). Parent Support/Involvement: Workshop resource materials. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory.

Purnell, R. F. & Gotts, E. E. (1984b). Teacher participation in home-school relations in rural, small-town, and urban communities. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Ryans, D. G. (1960). Characteristics of teachers: a research study. Washington,D.C.: American Council on Education.

Stallworth, J. T. (1981, November). Final report to NIE: A survey of elementary school teachers regarding parent involvement in school. Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Swick, K.J. (1979, October). Toward a meaningful family-school relationship. Clearinghouse, 53(2), 97-100.

Tangri, S. & Leitch, L. (1982, May). Barriers to home-school collaboration: Two case studies in junior high schools. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Williams, D. L., Jr. (1981a, April). Parent-involvement training in elementary teacher preparation. Paper presented at the annual meeting of AERA in Los Angeles.

Williams, D. L., Jr. (1981b, November). Final report to NIE: A survey of elementary principals regarding their attitudes toward parent involvement issues. Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.